

KISKIACK



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On John Smith's first map of Virginia the locale around Lee,
Yorktown is noted "Kiskiack," although in his writings he referred
to this section as Chiskiack. Other writers have used such spellings
as Chesiak, Chischiacke, Kiskyache, Kiskiak, Kis-Kiskiak, and even
the corruption of corruptions, Cheese-cake. With philologists still
quarreling among themselves over the proper meaning of the word
"Chesapeake" we hesitate to advance a definite interpretation of
"Kiskiack." Having little knowledge of Indian terminal generics, we
are content to accept the generally adopted meaning "broad ^{or} flat
land" which, indeed, describes the land above Yorktown. The name
applied not so much to a definite site on the river as to all the
territory inhabited by the Kiskiack Indians. They lent their name
to the tribal chieftain or "werowance," whom Smith called "Chescaik"
although this apellation was also subject to various spellings.

Often hostile to the first settlers, the Kiskiacks discouraged
any attempts at permanent settlement along the York. To thwart this
menacing attitude of the Indians, the taking up of land along the
York was stimulated by a Court Order of October 8, 1630, which offered
fifty acres to every colonist who would take up residence for a year
in "the Forest. . . for securing and taking in a tract of land, bounding
upon the Chief residence of the Pamunkey King, the most dangerous
head of the Indian enemy" and twenty-five additional acres if the

There is no documentary evidence of any family connection

colonist was still alive the second year. Lee of Northumberland,

With the doughty Captain Felgate, a London skipper, taking the initiative and supported by John Utie, the West brothers, Henry Lee, and Nicholas Martiau, land was gradually taken up and patented along the York, and the Indians were slowly but surely driven from that section to the opposite side of the river.

The first settlement along the York retained the original Indian name of Kiskiack. To this wilderness came Henry Lee, obtaining patent in 1641 to two hundred and fifty acres of land to which he was entitled because, pursuant of the Court Order of 1630, he had brought five persons to settle with him. He cleared lands and built the snug little brick house that still stands, the oldest Lee house in this America. It is one of the best small examples of mid-seventeenth century brick architecture in Tidewater. The story and a half structure has dormer windows, interesting chimneys at either gable, and fine brick-work. within the confines of Camp Peary, the U.S.

Nine generations of Lees have called the old house at Kiskiack their home, and it is impossible to visit the site without experiencing profound stirrings of the imagination. In a section where it took only twenty-five years from "farm to forest," this old plantation has remained long untended; and the forest has closed in all around the house, giving the location very much the appearance it must have had before the land was cleared and Henry Lee dared move into the heart of the Indian country. his holding "Poplar Springs" and, at

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his death, left the estate to his son-in-law, Colonel John West, between Henry Lee of Kiskiack and Richard Lee of Northumberland, a nephew of Lord Delaware. In 1667, under the name "Poplar Neck" although both were originally from Shropshire, England. Richard the property was sold by West to Edmund Jennings who built thereon was to become the common ancestor of the two Lees who signed the a brick house and called it "Ripon Hall" after his ancestral home Declaration of Independence, Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot, in Yorkshire, England.

and also of Colonel "Light Horse" Harry Lee and his son, General

The fortunes of Edmund Jennings of Ripon Hall fill a full page Robert E. Lee.

in the annals of Virginia history. He became Attorney General.

The Lee House at Kiskiack burned in 1915, completely gutting Member, Secretary and then President of the Council, twice acting the interior, but the brick walls remain in an excellent state of Governor of the Colony and member of various committees that revised preservation. The structure is now within the confines of the Naval. the laws, treated with the Indians, and represented the colonists Weapons Station. The old Indian tribe is remembered by a broad in their affairs with the Lord Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, meadow that still bears the name "Indian Field"; and the Lee house both in Virginia and England. He remained a member of the Council is as often referred to as "old Kiskiack," the last reminder in this until his death in 1727 at Ripon Hall. He also served as Collector section of an almost vanished race.

of the Customs and Naval Officer and Receiver of Duties, during

North of Queen's Creek along the York River above Kiskiack were which office he originated the great tobacco fleets which sailed three early plantations, Ripon Hall, Vaulx Hall, and Porto Bello, in convoys strong enough to resist the attacks of pirates who were all of which now lie within the confines of Camp Peary, the U.S. numerous at this date.

Naval Construction Training Center for the Seabees of World War II.

Edmund Jennings was instrumental in laying out the town of

The first patentee of this land was one William Prior. He Williamsburg and establishing the College of William and Mary, settled just below Carter's Creek in 1637 on 600 acres of land that furnishing the Capitol and many other civic services. He assisted he had been granted by the Crown for transporting a total of twelve in the building of the first church of Middleton Parish at Middle persons to the new colony from England in conformance with the Plantation, which later became Williamsburg, was vestryman and Court Order of 1630. The following year title was changed to Major held a family pew. By his marriage he established one of the first Joseph Croshaw, a son of Captain Raleigh Croshaw, one of the colonists Families of Virginia and was the direct ancestor of Edmund Randolph, to Jamestown. Croshaw called his holding "Poplar Springs" and, at first Attorney General of the United States, and of the immortal

General Robert E. Lee. He added considerably to the original Poplar

his death, left the estate to his son-in-law, Colonel John West, a nephew of Lord Delaware. In 1667, under the name "Poplar Neck," the property was sold by West to Edmund Jenings who built thereon a brick house and called it "Ripon Hall" after his ancestral home in Yorkshire, England.

The fortunes of Edmund Jenings of Ripon Hall fill a full page in the annals of Virginia history. He became Attorney General, Member, Secretary and then President of the Council, twice acting Governor of the Colony and member of various committees that revised the laws, treated with the Indians, and represented the colonists in their affairs with the Lord Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, both in Virginia and England. He remained a member of the Council until his death in 1727 at Ripon Hall. He also served as Collector of the Customs and Naval Officer and Receiver of Duties, during which office he originated the great tobacco fleets which sailed in convoys strong enough to resist the attacks of pirates who were numerous at this date.

Edmund Jenings was instrumental in laying out the town of Williamsburg and establishing the College of William and Mary, furnishing the Capitol, and many other civic services. He assisted in the building of the first church of Middleton Parish at Middle Plantation, which later became Williamsburg, was vestryman and held a family pew. By his marriage he established one of the First Families of Virginia and was the direct ancestor of Edmund Randolph, first Attorney General of the United States, and of the immortal General Robert E. Lee. He added considerably to the original Poplar

Neck holdings until the lands of Ripon Hall comprised 1,750 acres.

From the heirs of Edmund Jennings, Ripon Hall passed into the hands of the Carter family; first to Robert "King" Carter, one of the wealthiest and largest landholders in Virginia and later to his son, Landon Carter, who occupied the place at the time of the Revolution.

The adjoining 330 acres south of Ripon Hall Plantation were held by Robert Vaulx. "Vaulxland," as he called the estate, was patented in 1655; and on the north bank of the mouth of Queen's Creek, he built his manor house, Vaulx Hall. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the property was successively the home of the Robert Vaulx, Peter Temple, George Richards, Samuel Timson, and Colonel Edward Champion Travis families. The point on which Vaulx Hall was built later became known as Timson Neck and Travis Point.

The land west of Camp Peary was owned by the Custis family. Daniel Parke Custis married Martha Dandridge and when Daniel died, his widow married George Washington.

One mile from the mouth of Queen's Creek, on the north side of the creek was Porto Bello, the country estate of Lord Dunmore, Royal Governor of the Virginia Colony at the outbreak of the Revolution. Porto Bello had not been built by the Governor but was purchased from William Drummond in 1773 and used as a retreat and hunting lodge where Dunmore entertained many of the leading dignitaries of the times.

In spite of his sympathy with the cause of the coming Revolution,

It has been estimated that, at the coming of the white men, George Washington remained friendly with Lord Dunmore, and there is an entry in Washington's diary as late as May 26, 1774, that he rode out to have breakfast with the Governor at Porto Bello.

Upon receiving the news of the Battle of Lexington in April, 1775, and learning that the Virginia Militiamen were preparing to seize the arms and powder stored at Williamsburg, Lord Dunmore had the gunpowder removed to the man-of-war Fowery, then anchored in the York, to send up at midnight a detachment of marines and sailors to his assistance. These troops arrived at Porto Bello and the Governor made good his escape. This was the first outbreak of hostilities during the Revolution to take place in Virginia. When Dunmore fled the Virginia Colony the property of Porto Bello was seized by the newly formed government of the State of Virginia.

After six long years of war, the Revolution finally ended with the defeat and surrender of Cornwallis. One of the British Earl's outstanding officers, Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, was bitter in denouncing the failure of Cornwallis to utilize Queen's Creek as an avenue for attacking Lafayette from the rear and thus destroying him before he could join Washington's forces and conduct the Siege of Yorktown.

During the War of 1812 privateers were fitted out in Queen's Creek but no military action is known to have taken place there, although British warships were reported to have been seen in the York. One account places the enemy at least twenty miles from Yorktown.

It has been estimated that, at the coming of the white man, the combined tribes of the Tidewater numbered about nine thousand and subsequent importing of articles from England and the Indians, all being of the Algonquin linguistic stock. Although illiterate, they nevertheless lived under an organized government, controlled by custom and tradition, which was made up of many

The little settlement at Kiskiack was suddenly roused to intense activity when Benjamin Read, who had inherited old grandfather Martiau's ^{own} place or minor chief. In spite of their lack of mechanical devices, they were surprisingly adept in agricultural pursuits and before the white men came had domesticated more plants than any other race of men; including the later all-important Tobacco plant.

Of the 1607 population of nine thousand Indians and a handful of English colonists, only eight hundred Indian descendants exist today; whereas the present non-Indian population of Tidewater is over a million.

In Europe the apothecaries were prompt to exploit the new ^(tobacco) "drug" and, not having the slightest idea what it was, attributed

to it marvelous healing powers. In one form or another, usually boiled for several hours into a tincture, it was prescribed to sufferers of widely differing complaints. At that, it probably possesses certain pharmacuetical authority, for the patients either died on the spot or became encouraged to get better at once and avoid the possibility of a second dose.

Th original purpose of colonizing Virginia had been to "discover pearls and gold" and "to set up outposts against our ancient enemy, Spain"; but these aims were forgotten in the unexpected wealth of the tobacco culture.

The tremendous increase in trade brought by the shipping of tobacco to and subsequent importing of articles from England and the Continent necessitated the creation of a series of ports along the Tidewater waterways.

The little settlement at Kiskiack was suddenly roused to intense activity when Benjamin Read, who had inherited old grandfather Martiau's land below Kiskiack, was required to sell fifty acres of his land to establish a port at a point where the York River narrowed and where, from earliest times, there had always been a ferry to the Gloucester shore.

The new site was called Yorktown in honor of the Duke of York. So rapid was its growth and prosperity from the tobacco boom that within a very few years the Church, Courthouse, and other public activities which had heretofore been centered either at Kiskiack or the old settlement of York, further down the river, were moved to Yorktown.